

Bishop David G. O’Connell Remarks on Occasion of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development Fiftieth Anniversary

Thank you, Archbishop Gomez.

Brother Bishops, it is a great joy to have the opportunity to talk about the vital work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, or CCHD, and how it brings to life the mission of Jesus Christ "to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free."¹ Before I came up here to speak one of our staff members said to me “Bishop, I know you want your words to be immortal but that doesn’t mean they have to be eternal.” So I will try to be brief.

In his homily for the opening of the Synod, Pope Francis called us to be a Church that embraces the “art of encounter”; to “enter into [a] dialogue, [where] we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on a journey. And in the end, we are no longer the same; we are changed.”² CCHD is an excellent example of how the Church embodies Pope Francis’s call to encounter.

50 years ago our predecessors in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops had the wisdom to create a program that, while complementing the ongoing charity work of our Church, responded to the deeper structural issues that cause so much suffering among the poor and marginalized. Since then, CCHD has been working tirelessly to listen to the needs of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters and respond in a way that turns **personal pain into public action**.

I myself have had the privilege of being part of more than a few of the campaigns and endeavors that CCHD has supported over the years. I began my ministry in South Los Angeles in the late 80s and early 90s. The problems then were very similar to what is facing our inner cities now. We had riots where 70 people were killed and businesses were burned down. Thousands of young African American and Latino youths whose lives were destroyed by drugs and gang violence. We had thousands of immigrants coming in every week at a time when the state of California was turning against immigrants. Our response was to organize and with help from CCHD, we conducted hundreds of house meetings, thousands of one-on-ones, and built relationships between people. We worked with police, sheriffs, and gang intervention workers.

¹ Luke 4:18, New American Bible (Revised Edition).

² Pope Francis, *Opening Homily for the Synod*, October 10, 2021.

We built up leadership within our parishes. We worked with the city and county to build a way forward for our people. Our Catholic parishes were doing the work of community organizing to together transform the lives of the people of South Los Angeles. We achieved a huge reduction in violence, better schools, and safer neighborhoods. The work of organizing worked then and it can work now as we face these problems all over our country.

Over the last 50 years, CCHD has supported projects like ours in south Los Angeles all over the country. It has awarded **over 440 million dollars** in grants supporting **nearly 12,000** community-based, grassroots-led organizations. CCHD's work has been led from within our communities and includes even today more than 950 clergy and 1200 parishes.

Distinct from the important work of direct service efforts, CCHD supports organizations and initiatives that address the root causes of poverty by empowering those who are victims of injustice, **to decide for themselves** how to transform their communities into places where all can thrive. Thanks to the generous contributions of faithful Catholics across the country, CCHD invests in change that is sustainable because it involves local ownership, participation, and leadership.

Through CCHD, the Church has invested:

- 65 million dollars in economic development initiatives
- more than 28 million dollars in organizations working to support immigrant rights
- 27 million dollars in projects that address access to quality housing and homelessness
- 22 million dollars in neighborhood improvement and crime prevention efforts
- and over 18 million dollars in efforts to increase access to quality education – and these are just a few of the **many** issues that CCHD has funded.

Organizations supported by a CCHD grant are carefully selected because they embody the moral and social teaching of our Catholic faith. Recipients of CCHD funds complete a thorough application process, which includes endorsement by **BOTH** the local Bishop and the national subcommittee of Bishops, and are closely monitored throughout the length of their grant to ensure fidelity to the grant agreement. CCHD staff maintain close relationships with our supported organizations and stand at the ready to answer any questions and provide any

necessary support regarding our grants. Our Church's moral teaching is a gift to the world and **CCHD's work enfleshes that gift.**

In addition to our grants, CCHD's engaging educational programs enable Catholics to understand the reality of poverty in America **and** to work together to transform their community. Educational programs include a range of bilingual Catholic social teaching resources, an internship program for young adults, and pastoral placement opportunities for seminarians – and even an art contest for middle and high school students.

As Pope Francis tells us, **we must** listen to and empower those who society has often left out of the conversation, we must not just work **for** the people who are suffering but work with them, and support their efforts to bring about social change, **we must** hear the call of the Spirit at work in the world and respond with hearts open to the needs of our neighbors. **This is the work of CCHD.**

I'd like to take a moment to share with you a few of the voices of the many beneficiaries of CCHD over these last 50 years.

[\[PLAY VIDEO\]](#)

As you can see, for more than five decades, CCHD has been supporting initiatives that empower families, immigrants, new mothers, the elderly, and those in need to encounter their neighbors and bring about a systemic change that overcomes divisions. Through the cultivation of relationships with national networks, local community groups, and partnerships across **racial, geographic, ecumenical, and interfaith lines**, the campaign has allowed the Church to stand in solidarity with communities in times of great need:

- In the wake of the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown and proceeding unrest in Ferguson Missouri, **Metropolitan Congregations United** quickly responded with their program Sacred Conversations on Race (+ACTION) as a way to provide safe and facilitated opportunities to engage congregations in addressing structural racism.
- To combat rising unemployment among textile and immigrant workers in rural North Carolina, **Opportunity Threads** was formed as a worker-owned cooperative that provides just wages, safe working conditions, and employee ownership.

- **Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation** is a grassroots community development organization that works to improve the quality of life for low-income Native American families on the Pine Ridge Reservation by building affordable housing, equity, and wealth among community members.

CCHD is solidarity in action and, as such, has had a **profound** impact on young adults. We had the pleasure of celebrating one such young person last night at the Cardinal Bernardin Award Reception, where we honored Ogechi Akalegbere for her work to empower low-income parents and to help parishes understand equity and racism. Many more young people have encountered the work of CCHD through our internship program which over the last 30 years has provided **over 500** fully-funded internships in more than half the dioceses in the United States. Whether or not they choose a professional career in the Church, our intern alumni **specifically** name their experience with CCHD as animating for them in how they live their lives, practice their faith, and even raise their families.

For 50 years, CCHD has embodied the call of the Church to go out to the margins, to “touch and heal the wounds of others.”³ **Now more than ever**, we need the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development so that our parishes can become places of transformation where **barriers are broken down** and **divisions are overcome**. CCHD stands ready to **continue** our work to empower our most marginalized neighbors to break the cycle of poverty.

In closing, I thank you, brother bishops, for your **tireless support of CCHD** and the organizations we have funded in your dioceses over the last 50 years. I thank you on behalf of the tens of thousands of beneficiaries of your unselfish support whose lives have been improved and who have changed the reality of the world around them. At a recent homily Pope Francis said that when the poor organize to improve their lives, they bring something new into the world.⁴ They bring hope to all of us. I would like to invite you **to join us** on this journey as we walk together to bring hope to our world. Amen.

³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 70.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Homily for the Fifth World Day of the Poor*, November 14, 2021.